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LATIN CLUB NOTICE

EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE LATIN CLUB—MAY 19, 1906

Professor Kirby F Smith of Johns Hopkins University will address the club on a subject to be announced later at the Hotel Marlborough, Thirty-sixth street and Broadway, New York City. We shall sit down promptly at 12 M. Seats will be reserved for those holding tickets, others should be sure to notify "THE LATIN LEAFLET", 1050 Bergen street, Brooklyn, by postal card, if intending to be present. ATTEND TO THIS MATTER NOW.

Election of Officers for 1906-7 will take place at this meeting.

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THE VALUE OF LATIN IN EARLY EDUCATION

[An address delivered before the New York Latin Club on February 17, 1906, by Professor Sidney G Ashmore.]

In Three Parts—Part III

In brief then, the modern languages are less concrete in their vocabulary than Latin, and more capricious and illogical in word-order and idiom. Even Greek is a better instrument for our purpose than a modern language. In fact it would prove superior to Latin, as a means of training, but for its greater complexity of structure and its more generally abstract qualities—for it must be remembered that we are not concerned to-day with the Greek and Roman literatures regarded as culture studies, so much as with the purely disciplinary features of the languages themselves taken in their relation to the development of the young brain. Were this not the fact we should be obliged to place the boot on the other leg, for undoubtedly in the later years of the school period, as well as in the college or university, Greek studies make a claim upon our pedagogic conscience that is all but irresistible. The highly imaginative mind of Hellas constructed a language commensurable with its powers of speculative and abstract thought. The home of philosophy, poetry, and art produced a medium of verbal expression, such as the world itself since then has never known the equal. The Roman could imitate all this; he could not parallel it. The Roman mind, in its origin, was not imaginative, nor artistic, but simple and practical; not speculative, but given to the study of government and law, and the language to which these qualities gave birth was simple and logical and precise, and was characterized by that tendency to concreteness of expression, which was natural to a nation whose thoughts were far removed from habits of analysis or introspection.

These considerations seem to me to furnish adequate reason why Latin, and perhaps Greek, should take precedence in the school curriculum, of the physical sciences, of mathematics, and even of the modern languages.

But to make good what has been said, certain practical suggestions will perhaps be in order. First:

much the same principles should be applied in teaching Latin (and Greek) at the start, as are applied in teaching the mother tongue or any other modern language. I do not mean that the pupil should be taught to speak Latin, although writing Latin is an exercise of the utmost value and importance; I mean that pains should be taken to give the child a very considerable vocabulary, before a word is said to him about grammar. Second: the vocabulary should not be acquired from lists of words placed before the child to be memorized. It should grow and wax abundant within him, as the result of constant reading. Can he read without grammar? Certainly he can. What he can do with his mother tongue or with French or German he can do with Latin, provided he is guided to it in the right way and at the right time of life. A vast amount of easy and interesting reading in Latin may be accomplished by a boy or girl under twelve years of age, with little conscious knowledge of formal grammar, and yet with a very distinct feeling for the relations of words and their order in a sentence. This done, and all that falls under the head of syntax may begin to take conscious shape in the mind. But the beginning should be slow, for grammatical analysis means also grammatical nomenclature, and grammatical nomenclature is distinctly a hindrance, a real stumbling block, to the growing intellect, unless it be approached warily. If I may judge from an experience of many years with freshman classes at Union College and elsewhere, I should say that the teachers in the schools are in too great haste to impress upon their pupils the so-called rules of syntax. The teachers seem to imagine that if they can only fill the infant brain quite full of such terms as characteristic, volitive, jussive, stipulative, contingent futurity, obligation and propriety, and countless other labels which the research and ingenuity of scholars have done much of late years to multiply for our learning—that if they can only pound these terms, in sufficient number, into their pupils' brains, they will really be making acceptable Latinists.

But we who are gathered here to-day know very well that highly valuable as these things are, and greatly as they reflect credit on their discoverers and inventors, it is a mistake to suppose that they have any real significance where the child mind is concerned. We know that familiarity with the vocabulary of a language is more than half the battle. We know, to put it more technically, that "the synthetical impressions of a language regarded as a whole should be upon the brain before the pupil is called upon to analyze". This is a fundamental principle. One word more! I believe that reading (not infrequently without translating) is the best way to acquire a Latin or Greek vocabulary, and that the reading of a child should be voluminous, but not either difficult or dry. In addition to such books as "*Viri Romae*" and the "*Fabulae Faciles*", and some excellent "First Latin Books" now available, I would provide, in very considerable numbers, such simple stories as those which are constantly written in the modern languages

and relate to matters of every-day life,—stories similar to those of our English nursery books and to the German *Märchen*; and, saving your grace, I would have these stories made and published in what may be described as manufactured Latin, and for special use in the schools. They *can* be made, and well made too, and indeed would be created rapidly enough were there a demand for them. Something of this kind has been done in England, though on a limited scale, and might be done on a broader scale here, and with good results. I believe that if time were assigned to early reading of this character, greater interest would be excited in the pupil, and less time would be needed than at present for the so-called High School work in Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil; for young people would become more familiar than they do now with the forms of the language, before they are called upon to deal seriously with the syntax of classic authors. I know this is heresy—rank heresy (and I cannot do more than hint at it on this occasion), but I become something of a heretic when I see the results of the present tardy system,—a system that doubles the work to be done between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, because it fails to undertake what might easily and quickly be accomplished at an earlier time. In short, if the child's mind, between the ages of eight and thirteen, were nourished, in part at least, on a species of Latin Mother Goose, the Latin would become to him a species of mother tongue, and the goose would soon fly with him into exalted fields of linguistic attainment. Professor Wenley is on the right track when he says (in the *School Review* for June, 1905): “culture studies ought to be begun at an early age; *ten is none too soon*”; and he is at pains to state that by “culture studies” he means nothing more nor less than Latin and Greek. All this seems to be in accord with nature, and is not without its analogy in our treatment of the modern languages.

But after all, the value of Latin regarded simply as an aid to the acquisition and correct use of the English language, is one of its most practical virtues, and a matter that cannot be too much insisted on. In general conversation on this topic one is met with such remarks as, “Oh, yes! So many Latin words are like the English!” or “So many English words are derived from the Latin—the Latin helps!” Few people seem to comprehend that there may be something more closely connected with the question than matters of etymology and derivation. No doubt one's English vocabulary is enriched by acquaintance with a source whence many of its vocables are derived. But should Latin be valued more on this account than any one of several other languages which have contributed of their wealth to our native speech? Perhaps English has as much in common with the Teutonic tongues as with those of southern Europe, and, after all said and done, it may be affirmed that the best way to learn English is to *learn* it, and to let other languages take care of themselves. True, there is a fallacy concealed in this last argument, which is a half truth and nothing more. Yet there is something to be said in favor of that practical attitude of mind which assumes that it is better to learn one language well than to learn half a dozen languages very imperfectly. The fallacy lies in an imagined necessity to choose between two alternatives. He who has mastered his native speech, in the truest sense of the word, is a *rara avis* indeed, if he have done so without assistance derived from

other languages. Especially is this true of him who has a considerable command of English. Time, or the lack of it, prevents me from illustrating this point by reference to concrete examples. Perhaps, too, you will say that I am arguing in a circle. However that may be, I am convinced that the most practical value of Latin studies to the student of English is to be referred to that species of brain development which the ancient tongue does most to encourage if properly taught in childhood—a development that alone renders the acquisition of English, in its broader and more complex aspects, a possibility in later life.

It is not then merely on the side of derivation or etymology that we are indebted to Latin for an understanding or ready use of English; although we owe perhaps to the language of the Romans a large proportion of our most dignified and sonorous parts of speech, supplying us, as it does, with a bountiful stock of synonyms, and making it relatively easy for all sorts and conditions of men to find adequate expression for their finest thoughts and their most manifold experiences. But the debt of the student of English to the language of Cicero and Vergil lies deeper than this.

I have endeavored to convince you that the Latin language is the best instrument available for the task of developing in the child the concept centres of the brain, that is, for calling into play those brain cells one of whose special functions is to handle words and the problem of their manifold relations. Indeed, if regarded as a means of practice and of progress in the act of applying the fundamental principles of human speech to the correct and fluent use of any language, it is the most perfect instrument among the tongues of Europe. Now in this very particular Latin is of the highest importance to English, and for the following reason: unless I am greatly mistaken, there is no modern language of any repute in which it is possible for a man to express himself either more elaborately, elegantly, and clearly on the one hand, or more vaguely, clumsily and disconnectedly on the other, than in the language of Great Britain. The English tongue has the faults of its qualities. Its analytic character and its large and varied vocabulary give it tremendous capacity of expression. These qualities render it, at the same time, vastly well fitted to drown its meaning in a sea of pure sound and senselessness. No European speech is its equal in these two aspects of its nature. The loss of its inflections and the fact that its idioms, or conventional forms of expression, are less definitely fixed than the idioms of other tongues, while contributing to its flexibility, render it also more capable, than e.g. either French or German, of a loose and illogical arrangement of its elements. Add to this the fact that its superabundant vocabulary requires skilful manipulation, to a degree exceeding the requirements in this respect of, perhaps, any other language, and you have something that may easily prove unwieldy and even hopeless, if placed in unskilled hands. In brief there is no one so in need of the preliminary training which the proper study of Latin may give, both in the logical use of words and in the fundamental principles of universal grammar, as he who aspires to a correct and lucid command of the English tongue. The right use of English, whether in speaking or writing, requires more careful and logical thinking than the right use of any other modern language. The right use of English is the most vital concern, in my judg-

ment, of American education, for it presupposes as a necessary condition to its achievement a habit of mind that is none too common among educated Americans,—a habit of making use of its materials independently of memorized phrases, yet not without strict reference to fundamental laws,—a habit of thought that is accurate in its selection of words and phrases, and logical as well as lucid in its arrangement of those words in sentences; a habit or mode of thinking such as, if we may judge from what has been left to us, must have been strikingly characteristic of those writers of antiquity to whom we are indebted for our legacy of the Roman classics. Accuracy, perspicuity, logic—these are the watchwords of the situation. These terms point to those qualities of brain and mind, which are most certainly dependent for their growth on early training, which are of more consequence than anything else to the would-be master of the English tongue, and are more fully and surely attainable through the study in childhood of Latin and Greek than through any other means within our reach.

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